```
K2p1cama
      UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
1
      SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK
2
3
      SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY, INC.,
 4
                     Plaintiff,
5
                                               18 Civ. 5134 (JSR)
                 v.
6
      FRIEZE EVENTS,
 7
                     Defendant.
                                              Oral Argument
8
                                                New York, N.Y.
9
                                                February 25, 2020
                                                11:08 a.m.
10
      Before:
11
                             HON. JED S. RAKOFF,
12
                                                District Judge
13
                                 APPEARANCES
14
      LEWIS SAUL & ASSOCIATES, P.C.
15
          Attorneys for Plaintiff
      BY: LEWIS SAUL, ESQ.
           EDWARD A. COLEMAN, ESQ.
16
17
      KELLEY DRYE & WARREN, LLP
           Attorneys for Defendant
      BY: MICHAEL C. LYNCH, ESQ.
18
           JAMES B. SAYLOR, ESQ.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
```

24

25

| 1 | (Case called) |
|----|--|
| 2 | THE DEPUTY CLERK: Will the parties please identify |
| 3 | themselves for the record. |
| 4 | MR. SAUL: Yes. Good morning, your Honor. Lewis |
| 5 | Saul, S as in Sam, A-U-L, for plaintiffs. |
| 6 | MR. COLEMAN: And Edward Coleman from Lewis Saul & |
| 7 | Associates for plaintiff. |
| 8 | MR. LYNCH: Good morning, your Honor. For the |
| 9 | defendant, Michael Lynch from Kelley Drye & Warren. |
| 10 | MR. SAYLOR: Good morning, your Honor. James Saylor, |
| 11 | also of Kelley Drye & Warren, for the defendants. |
| 12 | THE COURT: Good morning. |
| 13 | All right. As near as I can tell, nothing has |
| 14 | occurred in this case. Did I miss something? |
| 15 | MR. SAUL: No, your Honor. This motion was sitting |
| 16 | dormant for a year and nothing has occurred in the case. |
| 17 | THE COURT: And that's before Judge Moses, or has she |
| 18 | issued an order on it? |
| 19 | MR. COLEMAN: No. It was before Judge Batts. |
| 20 | THE COURT: No, no, no. That's not my question. It |
| 21 | was before Judge Batts. I thought she referred the motion to |
| 22 | Magistrate Judge Moses. |
| 23 | MR. COLEMAN: Correct. |

MR. COLEMAN: No.

THE COURT: Yes. Has Judge Moses done anything?

THE COURT: All right. Bear with me one minute. I want to call Judge Moses.

Please be seated. I'm sorry I didn't have the file in front of me and I'd forgotten that I'd already withdrawn the reference to Judge Moses. So I will decide that motion promptly.

I suggest the following case management plan. By the way, this is a jury case?

MR. SAUL: Yes.

THE COURT: Any additional parties must be accomplished by March 25th. Amended pleadings by March 25th. First request for documents must be served by March 4th. The extremely limited interrogatories permitted by Local Rule 33.3(a), which are the only interrogatories I permit, must be filed by March 4th.

Does either side anticipate experts?

MR. SAUL: Possibly, your Honor. One.

THE COURT: Okay. So moving experts June 19th; answering experts, July 10th. All depositions to be completed by July 24th. Requests to admit served by June 17th. All discovery to be completed by July 24th. Moving papers on any summary judgment motion August 7th. Answering papers August 21st. Reply papers August 28th. Oral argument on any summary judgment motion, September 11th, at 2 p.m.

Any problem with any of those dates?

```
1
               MR. SAUL: No, your Honor.
 2
               THE COURT:
                           Okay.
 3
               MR. LYNCH:
                          Your Honor?
 4
               THE COURT:
                          Yes.
 5
               MR. LYNCH:
                          No. Never mind. It's okay.
6
               THE COURT: All right. So I've signed a case
 7
     management plan incorporating all those dates, and I'll give it
      now to my courtroom deputy to file, to docket it
8
9
      electronically.
10
               All right.
                          Anything else we need to take up today?
11
               Very good. Thanks very much.
12
               MR. SAUL: Your Honor, there's an outstanding motion
13
      that --
14
               THE COURT: I'm going to assign that in a matter of
15
      days.
16
               MR. SAUL:
                          Okay. Thank you, your Honor.
17
               THE DEPUTY CLERK: All rise.
18
                                    000
19
               (In open court)
20
               THE COURT: I was so, as you may have gathered,
21
      chagrined by the two cases prior to yours that I completely
22
      forgot that I wanted to give you the opportunity today to have
23
      oral argument on your motion.
24
               I have a conference call at 11:30, but let's at least
25
      start oral argument, and then the conference call will only
```

last ten minutes or so, so we can continue after that if necessary.

So let me hear from moving counsel.

MR. LYNCH: Plaintiff?

THE COURT: From moving counsel.

MR. LYNCH: Oh, I'm sorry. I couldn't hear what you said.

THE COURT: That's all right.

MR. LYNCH: Good morning, your Honor.

This case, to the extent that you haven't had a chance to familiarize yourself too much with it, it involves an art fair that our client Frieze puts on on Randall's Island every May in New York. They have another one in London and another one in Los Angeles.

In May of 2018, the plaintiff here was one of the galleries that rented space to be part of that fair. Our fair on Randall's Island has a series of tents that they're in, and the complaint here is essentially that, we believe, plaintiff didn't make the number of sales that they had hoped to make or that they expected to make, and so as a result, although that was not, you know — there was certainly no guarantee by the defendant in terms of how many sales they would make, they've now attempted to blame the weather for that lack of sales. And in particular, Judge, the first two days of this fair, which is a five-day fair in early May, the temperature in New York

exceeded 90 degrees, as plaintiff has alleged. And the complaint is that the --

THE COURT: Just a function of global warming, I'm sure.

MR. LYNCH: Who knows.

So the complaint is essentially that the air conditioning was insufficient and, as a result, they didn't make the number of sales and drive the traffic that they --

THE COURT: Well, as I understand it, the key clause of the contract is Section 18: "Frieze will use commercially reasonable efforts to provide common area lighting, heating, and air conditioning but shall not be liable for any loss or damage due to failure or interruption of any service." And the question is whether plaintiffs have adequately alleged that you failed to use commercially reasonable efforts. Do I have that right?

MR. LYNCH: Yes.

THE COURT: Okay. So as I further understand it, there were air conditioning vents located along the ceiling, which was a change from years past when they were at the tent's floor, yes?

MR. LYNCH: That's the allegation, yes, your Honor.

THE COURT: And I understand you may not agree with any of these allegations, but for these purposes, I take them as established if they're well pleaded. And in any event,

whatever air conditioning there was, they say, was totally insufficient.

There doesn't appear to me to be much New York law -much law, period -- on what is meant by "commercially
reasonable efforts." And a question I have for your adversary
is whether they have adequately alleged the specific ways in
which the air conditioning fell short of the standard, but this
kind of dispute has historically, in other kinds of torts, been
a classic jury question, so I wonder why it isn't here.

MR. LYNCH: Your Honor, so it could be. We've cited some case law that sets a very high standard, in particular the Holland Loader case, which plaintiffs also cited. It's a Southern District case from 2018. And that sets the standard as a conscious attempt to secure an outcome or some affirmative action by the party required to exert efforts. Now there's no allegation that we failed to exert efforts.

THE COURT: I'm looking at that case by Judge Woods, and it says, confirming what I just said, although there is "scant case law defining the phrase 'commercially reasonable efforts,' compliance with a commercially reasonable efforts clause requires at least some conscious exertion to accomplish the agreed goal." That sounds like not a matter that can be dealt with on a motion to dismiss.

MR. LYNCH: Well, your Honor, I would respectfully disagree and I would point you to the pleadings in the

complaint where the plaintiff first acknowledges that there was air conditioning, right? So there was an effort to have air conditioning there. And that's not the kind of sort of failure to act that these cases talk about in terms of the pleading standard, the minimal standard. That air conditioning unit, you know, worked three — the third day in, there was no complaint that it didn't work. That day it was in the 80s. Obviously plaintiff themselves plead that this was a heat wave, an unexpected heat wave which set records.

THE COURT: Well, when you say unexpected heat wave, the temperatures like that would be normal like in July and August. It's not like an experience -- I made the joke about global warming, but just human experience is that there are often days in May that are summer heat, just like there are often days in April that are winter cold. I mean, those things happen with the change of seasons. I don't see what's so unusual in terms of foreseeable expectations that there would be a really hot day or two in May.

MR. LYNCH: So foreseeable is not the standard. So the standard is whether it's compliant, whether they've taken actual steps and actual actions to meet the need. It's not an absolute guarantee, if you look in the cases. One of the other cases talks about how it's not a hindsight comparison of what you could have done better, you know, what it might have been. And here, the plaintiff doesn't plead what concrete steps we

failed to take, what concrete steps we could have taken that could have resolved the issue.

You know, this was extreme heat. I don't think there's a question about that. And while you may be able to anticipate that, it's also commercially reasonable, right? The standard is not we have to take all steps to guarantee against all possibilities. It's a commercially reasonable --

THE COURT: Commercially reasonable, one would think, means commercially reasonable under what would be the expected conditions. I don't see how the issue of foreseeability is irrelevant. It's not the standard, but I think it's still relevant. If a reasonable commercial vendor, asked to air condition a tent, was not taking into account that there might be some very hot days in May, why isn't that commercially unreasonable or at least a jury question as to whether it was commercially unreasonable?

MR. LYNCH: Well, I think the plaintiff has to plead facts that we failed to take some steps that we could have done to fix the problem. The cases which analyze the issue talk about basically an abandonment of your obligation. Plaintiff even pleads that we were attempting to fix it during the heat wave, that we were taking affirmative steps, that we were, you know, we were doing what we could do under the circumstances. You know, and again, I would just say it's not an obligation to prepare for all circumstances. It's not an obligation to

```
prepare for extreme situations. It's a reasonably commercial
1
 2
      standard, which is lower.
 3
               THE COURT: But -- and maybe we're still at odds here.
 4
               MR. LYNCH:
                          I'm sure --
 5
               THE COURT: Yes, it's not a guarantee that you will
6
      prepare for all possible events. You know, there's an
 7
      unbelievable heat wave that no one could ever have expected,
      but it doesn't mean that you don't prepare for changes in
8
9
      temperature that are reasonably foreseeable. You're not
10
     maintaining, are you, that if the average high temperature in
11
     May was 70 degrees, hypothetically, and your air conditioning
12
      failed to work adequately at 71, you would have still been
13
      commercially reasonable?
14
               MR. LYNCH: No, but I think, you know, mid 90s is a
15
      little different, and plaintiffs even acknowledge --
16
               THE COURT: I agree, but -- well, all right.
17
               With apologies, I have to take that conference call,
      but we will continue. I don't imagine this call, worst case,
18
19
      will last more than 15 minutes, so why don't you come back in
20
      15 minutes, and if it's about five minutes later, so be it, but
21
      I don't think it will be later than that.
22
               MR. LYNCH: Thank you, Judge.
23
               THE COURT:
                          Very good.
24
               (Recess)
25
               (In open court)
```

THE COURT: Please be seated.

So let's continue.

I didn't have a chance to ask you about the other part of this clause, the no liability. So it says in Section 18, "Frieze will use commercially reasonable efforts to provide common lighting, heating and air conditioning but shall not be liable for any loss or damage due to failure or interruption of any service." So if that means what I think you're saying it means, doesn't it totally wipe out the first clause?

MR. LYNCH: Yes, it does.

THE COURT: So --

MR. LYNCH: Well --

THE COURT: So you are free to, under this contract, to use commercially unreasonable services, commercially unreasonable efforts, because you can't be charged with any loss.

MR. LYNCH: So, your Honor, I think maybe I spoke a little too quickly on your question, but look, I think what that provision is saying is that we are going to do what we can to make this a comfortable environment for the fair. But everybody knows that it is an outdoor fair and there can be storms, there can be thunderstorms, there can be, you know, extreme weather conditions, and here, there was an extreme weather condition. It was literally an unprecedented heat wave, and I think here — it was. As they pleaded as well, it

was a record-breaking heat wave that year in May.

THE COURT: Well, I think my understanding is it was record breaking for those particular days. I'm not sure it was record breaking for May as a whole. But anyway --

MR. LYNCH: May can be a volatile month, but we're in early May. Your Honor, I guess, if I may, I think, you know, the idea is, we're going to do our best but you cannot hold us responsible for extreme weather conditions. And in fact, we do have Section 13 of the contract that addresses that specifically, in which we disclaim liability for any weather condition. And I think an unprecedented, record-breaking heat wave —

THE COURT: Yes. Very broad. I want to ask your adversary about Section 13 when we get to it, but my question to you is: Let's say you use unquestionably unreasonable commercial efforts, in my hypothetical. You're grossly negligent. You just blow it completely. But under your interpretation of these clauses we've just been discussing, your position is, ah, too bad, you agreed that we would not be responsible for any of the consequences. So is there any situation in which you could be held responsible? Is the first clause about "commercially reasonable efforts" just a phantom, a miasma?

MR. LYNCH: No, your Honor. What I would submit, your Honor, is that clearly gross negligence would be a situation

that would arise in which a claim could arise. And I don't think we're disputing that. We're just disputing that they pled that. With respect to 18 specifically, you know, what we are saying is we are going to do our best to get out to you these specific services on an island, unconnected to, you know, a building or an original source, and we are going to do what we can to make that work, but we want you to recognize that this is an inherently unpredictable event because it is an outdoor event.

THE COURT: All right. Let me hear from your adversary. We'll give you a chance for rebuttal at the end.

MR. LYNCH: Thank you, your Honor.

MR. SAUL: Good morning, your Honor.

THE COURT: Good morning.

MR. SAUL: Whether or not something is commercially acceptable is a question for the jury.

THE COURT: Well, they're saying, among other things, that to be adequately pleaded, it's not enough to say it was not commercially acceptable, that you have to say, because they didn't do this, they didn't do that, and they say you don't adequately allege that with specificity.

MR. SAUL: Well, we agree with the first half of that statement, but we disagree with the second half. And let me go through the complaint and point your Honor out to what we did in fact say.

THE COURT: Yes. Let me get a copy of the complaint.

Here we are. Good. Go ahead.

MR. SAUL: In paragraph 21, we state, of the first amended complaint, "Defendant breached by not properly designing, testing, and regulating the AC system."

Paragraph 21, "by failing to adequately respond to the problems resulting from high temperatures within the tent and breached its obligation to use commercially reasonable efforts to provide common area air conditioning." Paragraph 18 of the contract states they would use commercially reasonable efforts.

Paragraph 23 of the first amended complaint states, "Frieze was aware of the problem but took no action to correct it."

Paragraph 22 and 24 says, "At the beginning of the first day of the event, the heat in the tent was oppressive and the temperatures continued to rise throughout the day."

22, 24, 25, "The environment in which exhibitors were expected to conduct their business was not adequately air conditioned."

And it goes on and on and on. And we plead with specificity that they did not act in a commercially reasonable way. I'm sure that I don't have to remind the Court, because the Court knows, but under Rule 8 a complaint must only contain a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief, and reviewing a motion to

dismiss under 12(b)(6), courts accept all factual allegations, as I just stated, in the complaint is true and draw all reasonable inferences in favor of plaintiff.

THE COURT: Thank you for reminding me of that, but of course that has, in effect, had a gloss put upon it by the Iqbal and Twombly cases. And so, for example, you say in paragraph 21 that you just drew my attention to, "Frieze failed to properly design, test, and regulate the ability of the air conditioning system at the fair to adequately maintain an environment within which it conducts commercial business." But that's essentially a conclusion. It's not a statement of fact, it's a conclusory statement, that the design, testing, and regulation were "improper." So even before Iqbal and Twombly, those kind of allegations would probably not cut it for Rule 8 purposes.

Now you do add more detail, as you just pointed out, as to a failure, once the heat became oppressive, that, according to your complaint, they did nothing. Where do you find the contractual duty for them to do something at that point? I'll give you a hypothetical. So supposing they did make commercially reasonable efforts to design an air conditioning that would work, in my hypothetical, for all reasonably foreseeable events. They say they don't have to do that, but I'll assume that for purposes of the hypothetical. But along comes a heat wave that no one could reasonably have

assumed. It gets to 120 degrees. Your complaint seems to suggest that they have a duty to come in at that point and do something. But where is that in the contract?

MR. SAUL: Is the question if the temperature -
THE COURT: Well, I'm just saying, I'm looking at some
of the paragraphs you just brought to my attention.

- 22. "Within the first hour of the opening day, the heated temperatures in the tent were oppressive."
- 23. "Frieze was aware of the problem but took no action to correct."

So that presupposes, for that to be relevant, that they had a duty to correct it at that point. Where do you find that duty in the contract?

MR. SAUL: The duty is to provide, in the contract — then I can find — I can go through the contract, but the contract says that they will provide air conditioning — electricity, etc., etc., etc., and air conditioning.

THE COURT: No, no. I know that. But, for example -well, okay. I think, focusing on that, as you did, on
paragraph 23, because I'm not sure I see anywhere else anything
other than conclusory statements, not to mention one or two
what might be called rhetorical excesses.

Paragraph 32. "Frieze's offer is ludicrously insufficient to compensate plaintiffs and other exhibitors for Frieze's gross negligence as described above." I take it you

don't find their offer acceptable. But I don't think the word "ludicrous" is an appropriate professional word to use in a complaint.

Okay. Anything else you wanted to say?

MR. SAUL: No. Only just to reiterate, I think that we've pled, under the rules of pleading for a breach of contract, the elements necessary --

THE COURT: So supposing I disagreed.

MR. SAUL: I should have shut up.

THE COURT: That's all right. Supposing I disagreed and I would give you leave to amend. What would you add?

MR. SAUL: Well, I think that we -- I'm of sort of a double mind there. I think that we've pled properly --

THE COURT: No, I understand. And if I agree with you, that's that. But if I disagree with you, I want to know whether I need to give you leave to amend. I wouldn't give you leave to amend if there's nothing more you can add.

MR. SAUL: Well, I suppose that we would say -- we would speak with an expert and an expert would say -- for instance, if you're stuck on the tarmac when it's very warm outside, they bring in these big units blowing cold air. We could add that they should have done X, Y, and Z in order to bring the temperature down --

THE COURT: But --

MR. SAUL: -- that sort of thing.

1 THE COURT: All right. Thank you very much. 2 Let me hear in rebuttal from defense counsel. 3 Thank you, your Honor. MR. SAUL: 4 THE COURT: Thank you. 5 Thank you, your Honor. MR. LYNCH: 6 THE COURT: So following up on that, supposing --7 because I do agree with you that at least much of this complaint is conclusory. Supposing I were, hypothetically, to 8 9 dismiss the complaint. Second Circuit law says that in all but 10 extraordinary circumstances, have to give them leave to 11 replead, and they say they can fill in or they would consult an 12 expert to fill in the gaps. So is there any reason why I 13 shouldn't at least give them that leave? 14 MR. LYNCH: Your Honor, no. I think the problem with 15 the pleadings is that there is no more that could have been 16 done here. And I think what we're talking about is, you know, 17 we have reasonably -- we have an obligation to provide reasonably commercial efforts. Now what we tried to do is, we 18 19 had air conditioning. There's no allegation that on the third 20 day it didn't work, and that it was in the mid 80s for early 21 May, which is a high temperature, and so, you know, we were 22 dealing with an extreme weather condition. That is just beyond 23 anything --24 So what about this paragraph that I was THE COURT: 25 just focused on that when it reached these extremes, you did

1 | nothing?

MR. LYNCH: You're referring to their allegation in paragraph 23, correct?

THE COURT: Paragraph --

MR. LYNCH: In the complaint?

THE COURT: Yeah, I think that's right. Hold on just a second.

Yes, 23.

MR. LYNCH: So there is no obligation in the contract. We don't have an obligation to cure that. In fact, we think that we've disclaimed liability in the event of an interruption. Obviously it's good business practice to try to, you know, keep the customers happy and get it working, but there's no contractual obligation to do so.

And I would also submit, your Honor, that this is also a very conclusory statement, right, that we took no action and we did have an air conditioning unit on site that by the third day they were not complaining about. And so it's not that we took no action. I mean, they've even gone so far as to plead in their opposition brief that we handed out water bottles and that we were apologizing, but, you know, that is the extent of the allegation. And they have not and cannot identify a specific thing that they think we could have done.

Now, you know, it's also important to go back to where I started, which is in the *Holland Loader* case. You know, the

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

court there was saying, you don't go back in hindsight and sort of re-evaluate what they did. And that was sort of my quibble with the term "foreseeable." That is not the test. The test is, you know, looking back, was it commercially reasonable, and I think there is a difference there, and I think there's importance in the language in that case, and so for example, I think it's spelled out a little bit more in the -- there's a New York Court of Appeals case that we cited called JFK. in that case, your Honor, the plaintiff, JFK Holding, was suing the defendant, the Salvation Army, under their contract for failing to engage in commercially reasonable efforts to collect as much rent as they could from the City of New York in connection with a separate contract they had with the city. And in that instance, the plaintiff couldn't allege and didn't allege that there was any provision in that contract that would have permitted the defendant in that case to collect more, Their argument was basically about the condition of the building, and it didn't relate to the contract itself. And in that instance that was a case that was dismissed at the pleading stage. And that is a, as I said, a New York State Court of Appeals opinion.

We also cite another trial court matter, trial court case from New York State, where it was dismissed on the pleadings, but ultimately, you know, we feel that the commercially reasonable standard does not require us to prepare

for any eventuality and it becomes difficult to draw the line. You know, you mentioned earlier 120 degrees. Where does that line get drawn?

THE COURT: Okay. Thank you very much.

MR. LYNCH: Thank you.

THE COURT: So I thank both sides for their good arguments. I will give you a bottom-line ruling on this motion by Thursday of this week. I'm not sure I'll have a full opinion by then, but at least the bottom line.

There are obviously three logical possibilities. One is I deny the motion, then we already have the case management plan in place and go forward; one is I grant the motion with prejudice, that's the end of the case; one is that I grant the motion with leave to replead, in which case I will put plaintiffs on a very short time frame to replead. Probably a week for any amended pleading. And we'll adjust the case management plan accordingly at that point. So those are the three possibilities.

Anything else we need to take up today?

MR. LYNCH: Just a little clarification. When you say a bottom-line order, you're referring to the -- there's a --

THE COURT: It means it's two sentences: "The motion is granted"; "the motion is denied"; or, "The motion is granted with prejudice"; "the motion is granted without prejudice."

That's what I mean. I always follow it up with a full opinion.

MR. LYNCH: No, I've been before you for that as well. But my question is a little different. We haven't discussed a couple of the other claims, like unjust enrichment. THE COURT: I'm sorry. You're right to remind me. So the case management plan then stands in place then, given the other claims. Okay. Very good. Thanks very much. ALL COUNSEL: Thank you, your Honor.